

Papermaker recalls mill's early days

The story of papermaking at Camas is the story of people.

It's about the beater operators, the papermakers, the millwrights, the office workers. It's about the thousands of people, who, through their sweat, creativity and perseverance, have made Camas mill the thriving operation it is today.

It's about people like Vince Ast, a third-generation mill worker who dedicated 45 years to Crown Zellerbach.

"My grandfather, Bede Butler, helped lay the foundation for the original mill," stated Ast, obviously proud of his heritage.

Later, his father went to work at the mill, followed by Ast in 1933.

Waited for a job "Back then, the street used to run away into the mill, where the main office now stands," he reminisced. "I sat on the curb seven weeks — seven weeks of playing pinocchio, waiting for a job."

Finally, the personnel manager, Vic Gault, came out of his office looking for 15 men to load a barge of cottonwood.

"There were 16 of us waiting for a chance to work," said Ast. "He flipped a coin and I lost."

After two more weeks on the curb, Gault asked the 18-year-old Ast what kind of work he was interested in.

"I told him I wanted a job that had the opportunity for advancement — quite a mouthful for a kid back in '33, wasn't it?"

No training Ast was hired at the rate of 33½ cents an hour and was assigned to No. 5 paper machine.

"I stood there with my hands in my pockets, not knowing what to do. Finally, the backtender, who was busy chewing tobacco, told me to stand there, look smart and act busy as

New York mill is oldest in CZ

In case anyone is wondering, Camas mill is the second oldest paper mill in CZ. Glen Falls, N.Y., dates back to 1864.

Other oldtimers in CZ are: West Linn (1888), Baltimore (1907), Bogalusa (1910), Carthage (1918) and Port Angeles (1919).

Port Townsend was built in 1926, followed by Los Angeles in 1951 and Antioch in 1954. St. Francisville dates back to 1956. The newcomer in the group is Wauha, which was built in 1963.

hell."

After that not-so-impressive indoctrination, Ast began a 45-year career at Camas mill — a period that included 15 years of union work. In 1966, he went on salary and in 1978, or of the tissue machines. "The years went fast,"



Third generation papermaker Vince Ast looks at an old photo of Camas.

admitted Ast. "I can truthfully say that I enjoyed working at the mill. My fondest memory is of the companionship and congeniality I had with my co-workers. I also took great pleasure — pride, if you want to call it that — in putting out quality products that satisfied our custom-

ers."

When Ast started at the mill, heavy materials and rolls were hauled by hand truck. Later, he witnessed the advent of "those new-fangled things called 'mules'."

He remembers when the mill ran six days a week and closed on Sundays. He also

remembers a period during the depression when shifts were six hours.

Safety was a concern back then, but not as sophisticated as it is today, according to Ast. "In the early days, hearing protection consisted of stuffing a wad of cotton in your ears. You could tell an old paper-

maker by the missing fingers on his hands."

He also remembers the thousands of out-of-staters who "passed" through Camas to work at the mill while 400 employees went off to win the war.

"Some of those fellows got off the train from Kentucky and went straight to work," he said. "I remember that for a favor or two, I could use their sugar coupons."

He also has memories of making citrus paper on No. 2 ("a real aggravation"); the time he had 52 paper machine breaks in 6 hours ("I had to drag out the wet paper and throw it in a beater"); and when the mill made paper for core stock ("I paved through the trash looking for scraps of paper to re-pulp").

1948 flood He also remembers living in the MacMaster Building (now the mill office) as a newby in 1937; and rowing a boat in the mill basement during the flood of '48.

Some of his memories stretch back to before he began his career with Crown Zellerbach — from experiences he had as a youngster and stories told to him by his father and grandfather.

Historian In fact Ast is probably one of the leading authorities on the history of Camas mill — for the past three years, he has served as president of the Camas-Washougal Historical Society.

Besides the advent of electrical power in 1913, Ast believes the biggest change has occurred in the area of environmental protection.

"The kraft mill used to be unbearable," stated Ast. "It smelled like rotten cabbage. People were afraid to leave their laundry out to dry — if the wind turned, it could leave your clothes covered with ash. If you were fishing and left your spinner in too long, it'd be coated with slime when you pulled it out."

"Now," continued Ast, "it's unbelievable what they've done. There have been tremendous improvements in both air and water quality. Our environment is clean, but it cost a heck of a lot of money."

45-year career In reflecting upon his 45-year career, Ast said, "Unlike my father and grandfather, who laid some of the foundations that are still standing, I have contributed nothing 'concrete' or 'visible' to the mill operation. But, perhaps, there is evidence that I was there — some of my suggestions and ideas that, hopefully, have made Camas mill a better business and a better place to work."

"Each generation must appreciate what the earlier ones did," he continued. "Because of my sacrifices — and the sacrifices of the people who came before me — today's workers can enjoy a safer, easier way to make a living."

The next hundred years? "Unless there's a calamity, Crown Zellerbach will continue to protect the environment and raise trees. There will always be a market for paper, and I'm sure there shall always be a Camas mill. What the process will be like is anybody's guess — just look how far we've come since 1883."



Second century begins with modernization

It's doubtful that when Henry Pitcock built a small paper mill at La Camas to make newsprint for the *Oregonian*, that he could have foreseen the huge pulp and paper complex that now occupies the site.

Today, the mill turns out 377,000 tons per year of pulp and paper and converted products . . . but no newsprint. (That was discontinued in 1930, as Camas became a specialty papers mill.)

Since its beginning in 1883, Camas mill has undergone near-continual expansion and modernization. Currently, it's in the midst of the biggest change ever in its

100-year history — the single most expensive project ever undertaken by Crown Zellerbach.

In fact, the \$425 million project is the largest construction project in the region — bigger than Tri-Met's Banfield Light Rail program (\$310 million) and the Interstate 205 project, which was built for \$350 million.

It represents the only major capital investment by the paper industry in the Pacific Northwest.

When complete, the centennial mill will emerge as a cost-efficient, energy efficient, highly competitive white paper mill.

At the heart of the project are three key elements. These pieces of equipment include a sophisticated Kamyr bleach plant that will transform unbleached kraft pulp into top-quality bleached pulp for the paper machines.

In addition, a Kamyr continuous digester will produce 520 tons of bone dry pulp every 24 hours.

Finally, the Beloit Bel Baie II twin wire paper machine — No. 20 — will produce up to 160,000 tons per year of register bond and other business papers.

These key pieces of equipment — the displacement bleach plant, the magnetite continuous digester, and the Bel Baie II paper machine — will be among the largest of their kind in the world.

Environmental considerations are a top priority in the modernization project. At completion, the mill will meet 1984 water quality standards. Air quality will also be improved.

When completed, the mill will have some of the most modern systems in the world, operated by highly skilled personnel, and be capable of producing quality products at competitive prices — assuring that the next 100 years of Camas mill history will be as exciting, challenging and rewarding as the first.

Oldtimers tell about 'Ancient History' of mill

(Editor's note: Following are excerpts from an article, "Ancient History in Camas," published in the April, 1919, issue of *Makin' Paper*.)

Bede Butler claims to be the oldest man in the Camas mill. He says: "I landed here in 1884 and began working on the foundation of the old mill, helping with the construction and installation of the machinery. The present No. 8 was the only machine in this mill. We made straw paper in those days. There were only about 25 or 30 men working here then and I was a sort of roustabout. I worked on every job from watchman to boss — that is, when the boss was sick."

Jack Harrington claims second honors with regard to age. He says:

"I came to Camas in 1886

as foreman in the finishing room in the old mill, but it burned down about six months later, so I got a hammer and saw and helped build the second mill, which is still standing as that portion of the mill occupied by Nos. 3, 7 and 8 beater room. Our present No. 8 was the only machine in the old mill and it used to turn out about four or five tons a day, which was considered a record in those days. That is quite different from the 200 tons a day

ment. Camas is certainly good enough for me." Joe Teeson, millwright, began work in the old mill only three days before the fire. He claims the longest continuous record of service in the Camas mill, as he worked steadily here ever since.

"My father, Thos. Teeson, Lewis Tidland, Ed Tidland's father, and a man named Egbert had the contract to build the second mill," said Teeson. "I worked as carpenter on that building, alongside of Jack Harrington and Bede Butler. A portion of this old mill is still standing and houses Nos. 3, 7 and 8 beaters."

"When the mill was completed, I ran the grinders. We had only two pocket grinders then, making about six tons of pulp a day. Sulphite was shipped

in, and was very scarce, so we used bleached rags largely to give the paper strength."

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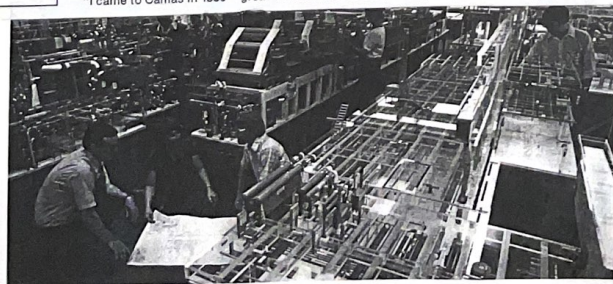
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Jim Windus (lower left) and personnel from Rust Engineering go over the details of a model of No. 20 paper machine.